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School psychologist's perceptions of system readiness, implementation, effectiveness, and impact on role as schools transition conflict management programs

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School Psychologist's Perceptions of System Readiness, Implementation, Effectiveness, and Impact on Role as Schools Transition Conflict Management Programs

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Abstract

This paper discusses educational systems change, specifically in regard to conflict management programs and discipline policies. Many students exhibit negative behaviors throughout their K-12 education and school psychologists are frequently involved in mediating those behaviors. Many schools have implemented programs such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices in schools in hopes of preventing and reducing student's negative behaviors. Both PBIS and Restorative Practices are intervention programs that teach decision-making and problem-solving skills (Ingraham et al., 2016), and shift the focus from reacting to negative behaviors with punitive consequences to focusing on strengthening desired, positive behaviors (Sprague, 2012). In this study, school psychologists who are familiar with or transitioned to utilizing PBIS or Restorative Practices are interviewed to gain insight about their perceptions of systems readiness for change, benefits and liabilities during implementation, effectiveness, and impact on practice. As a result of a thematic analysis, several themes emerged related to each area listed previously. Although systems are different, many of the same themes and perceptions were highlighted during interviews.

Introduction and Review of Literature

Most individuals, regardless of their upbringing or current experiences, know that change is not always desirable or easy. Change can be challenging; yet, it usually promotes some type of growth. Change can occur in small or large ways and can be slow or fast in nature. Sometimes we are blind to the fact that change is occurring in front of us. It is not always noticed until after the change process has come to an end. The process of change can be uncomfortable as it encourages individuals to let go of what they know and attempt something in a new fashion. Because of this, some individuals may push back or resist change.

Adopting change is different than putting it into action (Newton, 1990). Generally, there are four phases in the change process: adoption, implementation, maintenance, and outcome. These phases of change can be seen in virtually every context in which change takes place. Our experiences with and perceptions of the change are shaped and developed as we make our way through each phase.

The following paper will discuss change processes related to schools as well as how conflict management programs have changed in recent years. We will also examine school psychologist's perceptions of the school and their own practice as a result of a transition in conflict management programs.

Systems Change Theory

A system is made up of interconnected parts that work to serve a purpose. Within a system, relationships are recognizable, and each player has its own role. General systems theory provides a foundation for intervention and organizational development at

the systems-level (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). For change to occur, and be effective, it must be well planned and systematic (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012).

Change, or reform, efforts in schools tend to take place in a scaling-up manner. Scaling-up reform first starts in specific classrooms, is implemented school-wide, and then is implemented district-wide. According to Adelman & Taylor (1997), there are four overlapping phases that occur during systems change: creating readiness, initial implementation, institutionalization, and ongoing evaluation. The first phase, creating readiness, involves enhancing the school climate or culture. During initial implementation, well-designed plans are used to guide and support change as it is implemented in stages. Institutionalization involves making sure that a framework exists that can sustain and enhance changes over time. The ongoing evaluation phase involves developing measurement tools to assess the quality of the change and provide continued support as challenges arise (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012). When analyzing systemic change, it is important to consider the context, capacity, collaboration, and conceptual model of change.

People in schools, like all other systems, assume roles. Subsystems are formed, and while each subsystem may have its own unique goal, they are generally working toward a larger goal as well. Schools are considered to be "living" systems, meaning that the system is influenced by and influences the environment and other systems in a reciprocal manner (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012). Living systems are described as being "open" systems because of their reciprocal nature and interconnectedness (Curtis, Castillo, & Cohen, 2008). When implementing change, all parties should be aware that their actions will impact other individuals and the system at large.

Change Processes in Schools

Educational reform is something that all Americans are aware of and affected by. Changes to federal and local educational policy are constantly talked about in the news and discussed by professionals in the field of education. We aim to provide the best educational experiences to youth in our schools. These changes come in different shapes and sizes and look different depending on the system to which the change will be implemented. In past years, there has been a shift from documenting failures to analyzing what makes a change successful, and how that change can be sustained (Fullan, 1996).

There is no right reform or change process in education; rather the success or failure of such a change is dependent upon the school's collective willingness to change (Crissman, Spires, Pope, & Beal, 2000). In other words, what is successful for one school may not be as successful for another school due to several factors such as school personnel buy-in, available resources, school climate, community, etc. To fully understand the change process, we must consider factors such as educational setting, environment, the innovation itself, and how the change will be initiated and implemented.

Change in Conflict Management Programs and School Discipline Policies

Over the past few decades, policymakers have responded to concerns about school safety and disruption. These concerns were addressed with a "get tough" framework which relied on zero-tolerance policies, and consequent out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Skiba & Losen, 2016). This philosophy and subsequent consequences were intended to send the message that certain behaviors would not be tolerated.

Research on the implementation of zero-tolerance policies has shown that several groups are disproportionately impacted by the related consequences. National data suggests that approximately six percent of students are suspended once every academic year, and between one-third and one-half of students experience at least one suspension during their K-12 education (Shollenberger, 2015). When compared to white students, Black students are disciplined more frequently and more harshly, even when engaging in the same behaviors (Gregory & Weinstein, 2002). Students with disabilities are suspended approximately twice as often (Losen & Gillespie, 2012), and for longer periods of time (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014), compared to their peers without disabilities. Additionally, students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender are at increased risk for expulsion (Skiba & Losen, 2016). A student's history of suspension is a predictor of higher rates of suspension and antisocial behavior in the future (Hemphill et al., 2006).

While zero-tolerance policies were intended to decrease the frequency of disruptive behavior, they have shown different outcomes. These policies have shown to be ineffective, because immediate behavior concerns are addressed but future behaviors are not prevented. They increase the risk for negative academic and social outcomes (Skiba & Losen, 2016). The temporary "relief" that occurs when a student is suspended quickly fades when a student returns to school with the same challenges. When these students return to school, they have not learned more appropriate ways to behave and have missed out on instruction, causing them to become even more marginalized (Sprague, 2012). The zero-tolerance philosophy is still used in some schools today, but that may not be the best option for decreasing behavior problems.

Alternative Strategies for Managing Conflict

There are many other alternative strategies that can be used to shape student behavior. In fact, it has been suggested that the quality of teacher, student, and parent relationships is a stronger predictor of appropriate behavior and feelings of safety in schools (Skiba & Losen, 2016). If a student has positive relations with a teacher in their school, they are likely to behave in a more positive manner. Relationship building helps to create a sense of community within the school and makes it easier to repair any harm that results from conflict (Skiba & Losen, 2016). The frequency of positive behavior can be increased by implementing a structural intervention. Social-emotional learning can also decrease disruptive behaviors and increase positive behaviors. This approach helps students build skills to identify and manage their emotions, appreciate other's perspectives, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and effectively handle interpersonal situations (CASEL, 2003).

The ideas of implementing structural interventions and encouraging relationship building will be discussed further as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices frameworks are explored.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a framework which uses evidence-based practices and interventions to improve student academic and behavior outcomes (Ingraham et al., 2016). PBIS is not simply a reactive framework, it is a preventative framework that attempts to reframe school discipline (Sprague, 2012). By actively teaching and acknowledging expected behavior, students are able to change their own behavior and help to shape the behaviors of their peers. PBIS aims to define a core

set of behavioral expectations, reward appropriate behaviors, and implement a continuum of consequences for negative behaviors (Sprague, 2012).

PBIS is a multi-tiered system of support. At the primary level (Tier 1), PBIS aims to prevent initial problem behaviors through universal practices (Sprague, 2012). This universal prevention effort unites adults in the school building by using common language, common practices, and consistent application of positive and negative reinforcement ("Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports – OSEP," n.d.). Being that this level incorporates universal practices, interventions are implemented in the classroom to all students. A few examples of Tier 1 supports include setting behavioral expectations, labeling appropriate behavior in actions, teaching appropriate behavior, and observing and praising appropriate behavior ("Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports – OSEP", n.d.). As with most tiered and evidence-based interventions, data is collected throughout the tiers and is used to inform decisions.

At the secondary level (Tier 2), PBIS aims to reduce the reoccurrence of problem behaviors by targeting those students with multiple discipline referrals (Sprague, 2012). Interventions at the Tier 2 level of support often involve groups. Groups are used to bring together students with the same behavioral concerns so they can receive more targeted intervention. This type of group may focus on social skills, interacting with peers, or coping/problem-solving strategies. At this prevention tier, a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) may be completed to determine the function of a specific student's problem behavior ("Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports – OSEP", n.d.).

At the tertiary level (Tier 3) of prevention, PBIS aims to reduce the severity of a problem behavior in students who have chronic patterns of negative behavior (Sprague,

2012). In other words, intervention at this level attempts to reduce the intensity, frequency, and complexity of existing problem behaviors that are unchanged by Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions. Intervention is individualized and intensive. Behavior is identified by an FBA which informs behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) or person-centered plans such as wraparounds, which builds a team of individuals that are able to provide natural support to the student and his/her family as they work towards success. Examples of individuals that may be part of a wraparound team include, family members, members of a family's social support system, school personnel, and service providers ("Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports – OSEP", n.d.).

As mentioned, PBIS is data driven. Data helps determine which students need more intensive levels of behavioral support and when alterations to their current level of intervention should be made. Evidence has shown that PBIS, if implemented with high fidelity and sustained over time, can alter the trajectory for at-risk students and prevent negative behaviors from developing in other students (Sprague, 2012).

Outcomes of PBIS

Implementation of PBIS is linked to a reduction in problem behaviors (James, Noltemeyer, Ritchie, Palmer, & University, 2019; Noltemeyer et al., 2019). A quasi-experimental study by Freeman et al. (2016), examined the short-term relationship between PBIS and outcomes in the areas of attendance, academics, and behavior. Findings suggested reduction in office discipline referrals (ODRs) and increase in attendance rates when PBIS was implemented with fidelity (Freeman et al., 2016). Several studies have shown positive associations between PBIS implementation and

reduced suspension rates and disciplinary referrals (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010), and improved student prosocial behavior (Bradshaw, Waasdrop, & Leaf, 2012).

However, findings have been mixed regarding the association between PBIS implementation and academic achievement; school wide PBIS has not been consistently effective in promoting academic achievement (James, Noltemeyer, Ritchie, Palmer, & University, 2019). A study by Noltemeyer et al. (2019) found that, similar to past research (Freeman et al., 2016), implementation fidelity of PBIS did not have a main effect on academic achievement. Studies that have found positive associations between PBIS and academic achievement suggest that as behavior improves, students have more opportunities to be engaged in the classroom and receive more effective instruction. In other words, as students are actively engaged and instructional time increase, more positive academic achievement is possible over time (James, Noltemeyer, Ritchie, Palmer, & University, 2019).

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices stems from Restorative Justice (RJ) which is widely associated with crime and the justice system. RJ is used in combination with traditional judicial processes and serves as an alternative to punitive actions (Daly, 2002). Instead of focusing on compliance, RJ focuses on personal change (Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor, & Broderick, 2018), and provides individuals with an opportunity to work through and address a problem collectively. Since this approach has been introduced to the educational system, it has been given a new name: Restorative Practices.

Restorative Practices is an approach to behavior management that focuses on bringing students together to work through and resolve an issue at hand. There have been

several shifts in the way that Restorative Practices is implemented. Initially, Restorative Practices was carried out similarly to RJ, in a more reactive manner. The idea behind this framework is that "generating feedback loops will reinforce wanted behavior and provide a platform for individual growth within the system" (van Alphen, 2015). After an incident occurs, parties involved react by collectively addressing the problem.

Recently, there has been a shift to a more proactive or preventative approach to Restorative Practices, which is often referred to as the holistic approach to discipline (Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor, & Broderick, 2018). The purpose of proactive Restorative Practices is to promote personal accountability, change, and increase pro-social skills. Social skills and relationship building are incorporated into the proactive approach.

Restorative Practices teaches students about affective language, or feeling statements, and are encouraged to use them in response to their peer's actions. Students are encouraged to use "I" statements when addressing a problem and are taught to use language that avoids both blame and excuses. Teachers are encouraged to model the use of this language, so students are able to see positive examples of expressing feelings and dealing with problems.

Restorative Practices uses circles to allow students the time and space to address concerns or feelings before a problem arises. During a circle, students reflect on their own feelings and discuss group issues, which builds social awareness, self-management, self-awareness, and relationship skills. Students pass around an object, or talking piece, to indicate who has an opportunity to speak.

Mindfulness is the ability to be present, becoming aware of where you are and what you are doing. Restorative Practices incorporates mindfulness techniques to allow

students to become more self-aware, increase focus, and reduce stress and anxiety. Mindfulness techniques such as mediation, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation can be incorporated into a class routine as they do not take more than a few minutes to complete.

Creating a collaborative class agreement can be an additional way to incorporate Restorative Practices into the classroom. Collaborative class agreements allow students to brainstorm and set expectations for the classroom, rather than students entering a classroom with rules already in place. This encourages students to think about expectations that are important to them individually and provide space for them to work on their interpersonal skills as they agree with their classmates.

Restorative Practices focuses on developing communication skills, creating positive relationships, improving school climate, healing harm, and building empathy (Ingraham et al., 2016). A study by Kehoe, Bourke-Taylor, and Broderick (2018) looked at the effects of Restorative Practices, using a proactive approach, on student experiences and behaviors as well as teacher experiences and behaviors. Five key themes emerged from their discussions with both groups: harmony, empathy for others, awareness and acceptance of one's own actions, respectful relationships, and thinking in a reflective way. This is just one example of the types of changes Restorative Practices can bring to a school community. Not only does Restorative Practices focus on engaging the mind through problem solving, but it also focuses on engaging the heart by bringing awareness and empathy to others (Ingraham et al., 2016).

Outcomes of Restorative Practices

In an article by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), the past two decades of research related to the effectiveness of Restorative Practices at achieving various outcomes within US K-12 schools is summarized. The available evidence suggests improvements in some areas while results are more mixed regarding other outcomes.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) discuss clear improvement within schools as a result of implementing Restorative Practices. The majority of the studies reviewed reported some decrease in exclusionary discipline and violence. Evidence for school climate was more limited; however, findings suggested that school climate also improved as restorative practices was implemented.

Other outcomes such as bullying, student absenteeism, and academic performance suggested more mixed results after Restorative Practices were introduced. Restorative practices focus on promoting relationships and community, and it has been suggested that these strategies may also be effective in targeting bullying. Based on student reports (Acosta et al., 2019), more restorative practices in classrooms predicted less physical bullying and cyberbullying. When more restorative practices were utilized, students experienced higher levels of peer attachment and positive peer relationships, which could potentially affect the level of bullying within a school. Attendance rates tended to improve as restorative practices were implemented, however, these improvements were not stable over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Evidence that restorative practices leads to improvements in academic achievements and progress is also mixed. A study by Jain et al. (2014) compared schools in Oakland, California that were implementing restorative practices to schools that were not. Findings suggested that over the course of three years, reading levels increased by 128% in restorative practices schools compared

to an 11% increase in non-restorative practices schools. Another study by Kerstetter (2016) compared charter schools and the percent of third grade students who scored proficient on their state assessments. The restorative practices charter school had 60% of their students reach a proficient level while 36% of the comparison charter and 44% of students in the district reached proficiency. However, the following academic year, gains were not as significant, 47% of students attending the restorative practices charter, 41% of students at the comparison charter, and 44% of students across the district. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) suggest that restorative practices may coincide with high academic performance rather than directly improving academic performance.

Current Study

The current study aims to uncover how the implementation of conflict management programs effects the school and professional practice of school psychologists. To date, most studies focus on the perceptions of students and teachers while using PBIS and/or Restorative Practices. As psychologists possess knowledge on behavior, prevention, and intervention, they will likely offer a unique perception of the same programs. This study will provide insight into school psychologists perspectives of conflict management programs such as PBIS and Restorative Practices.

Several research questions that will be answered in this study:

1. How do school psychologists perceive their system in terms of readiness for change?
2. As a school transitions to PBIS or Restorative Practices or implements strategies from both frameworks, do school psychologists perceive the transition as effective?

3. What are the benefits and liabilities of transitioning from one program to another or implementing both PBIS and Restorative Practices strategies as perceived by the school psychologist?
4. How does the implementation of PBIS or Restorative Practices impact the practice of school psychologists?

It is hypothesized that: school systems will utilize data to inform systems change, and therefore be prepared for changes; school psychologists will perceive a more positive school climate and a reduction in the number of behavioral concerns; psychologists will see both benefits and liabilities while using these programs; and the practice of school psychology will be impacted in some way as PBIS, Restorative Practices, or a combination of programs is used in the school building.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited using a convenience sample. Practicing school psychologists in two mdi-Atlantic states were asked to answer interview questions based on their familiarity with PBIS and Restorative Practices, and whether they have transitioned conflict management programs since being in their schools. Participants were interviewed from various districts when possible. Below is a short narrative for each participant.

Participant 1 (Mary) is a psychologist at a high school in a large district. A number of years ago, her school received a grant to implement PBIS. Recently, the school has incorporated components of Restorative Practices into their PBIS framework.

Mary plays an active role within PBIS and provides more consultation for Restorative Practices (e.g. modeling; support circles in classrooms).

Participant 2 (Jessica) is a psychologist at an elementary and middle school in a large district. Jessica's elementary school uses a combination of PBIS and Restorative Practices. Jessica's middle school previously used PBIS, but is not currently. Jessica is more involved with regard to PBIS as she collects data and is responsible for progress monitoring.

Participant 3 (Betty) is a psychologist at two elementary schools. Betty's schools previously used PBIS and are currently using Restorative Practices. Betty notes that although her schools have similar demographics, one school is responding better to Restorative Practices compared to the other. She contributes that success to the fact that teachers and staff are invested in the framework and have established buy-in.

Participant 4 (Molly) is currently a psychologist in a high school. Previously, she worked in a middle school that had been implementing Restorative Practices for two years.

Participant 5 (Robert) is a psychologist at a middle school which utilizes the Restorative Practices framework.

Participant 6 (John) is a psychologist at an elementary school. John works within a city. His elementary school currently uses PBIS, and has used that framework for a number of years. John noted other schools, specifically at the middle and high school levels, are beginning to introduce Restorative Practices within the district.

Participant 7 (Susan) is a psychologist at an elementary school located in a city. Susan's school has been using PBIS for approximately three years. She collects behavioral data as part of her role within PBIS.

Participant 8 (Brittany) is a psychologist at an alternative school. Brittany's school uses Restorative Practices. Brittany is active within this framework as she models and participates in restorative conferences, proactive circles, and re-entry circles.

Instruments

Open-ended interview questions were composed to reflect the research questions of this study. Questions were divided into the following categories: systems readiness for change, implementation, perceptions of effectiveness, and impact on the role of school psychologists. Interview questions were created in hopes of gaining a comprehensive overview of school psychologists' perceptions of their system, school, and practice as it was influenced by a conflict management programs. A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Procedures

Eight school psychologists, who have transitioned to PBIS, Restorative Practices, or a combination of both frameworks, were interviewed. Interviews were conducted both in person and via phone. Interviews lasted approximately 3o minutes and were completed in one session. Interviews were recorded and transcribed per participant consent.

Analysis Plan

Qualitative data was collected from each interview and a thematic analysis was conducted to compare school psychologists' perceptions and experiences as they

transitioned conflict management programs in their district. Themes were analyzed for each interview question as well as within each category.

Results

A summary of sample responses can be found in Appendix B. With regard to systems readiness for change, three themes emerged: addressing the needs of students, creating standards, and openness (Table 1.1). Three themes emerged related to implementation: variation in responsibilities, buy-in, and positive atmosphere (Table 1.2). Responses related to psychologist's perceptions of effectiveness also yielded three themes: some change in school climate, effective in promoting relationship building, and not the only contributor to the reduction of negative behaviors (Table 1.3). Two themes emerged from responses related to the final research question, impact on the role of the school psychologists: responsibility and community (Table 1.4). Themes will be examined in more detail in the discussion section to follow.

Discussion

System Readiness for Change

School psychologists were asked about how their system decided a change was needed and how they were involved in the process. With regard to system readiness for change, three key themes emerged: addressing the needs of students, creating standards, and openness.

Needs of Students. One goal when implementing a behavior management program is to address student behaviors while in school. In order to address the needs of students and reduce negative behaviors, it is necessary that data is collected to inform decisions. Qualitative data, such as observations and interviews with students and staff,

and quantitative data, such as attendance rates, referrals, discipline data, suspension rates, etc., is often used when determining the type of services and resources needed in a school building, and thus informing systems change efforts.

Creating Standards. By deciding to implement a behavior management program, schools are subsequently able to create behavioral standards for their staff and students. A school-wide program such as PBIS or Restorative Practices introduces a set of behavioral expectations for all members within the school building. Psychologists and other professionals, such as behavior interventionists, may provide professional development to school staff to better explain behavior as a mode of communication. In addition to training, psychologists may be involved in modeling the behavioral expectations and creating materials, such as posters to hang around the school as reminders.

Setting behavioral expectations also allows for a progressive discipline plan to be created. Instead of automatically receiving an office referral or suspension, a behavior management program provides more support for students in hopes to remediating problems before suspension is needed. A progressive discipline plan makes it clear as to which type of outcome, consequence, or conference should be used following a negative behavior. School-wide behavioral expectations and responses creates an environment where students are aware of what is expected and what will follow an inappropriate behavior. If students are aware of possible consequences, they are more likely to think twice before acting.

Openness. Psychologists highlighted their personal and professional openness as a characteristic that helped them during the change process. Psychologists are able to take

on other perspectives, seeing situations and changes through various lenses, which promotes understanding. Psychologists are flexible in their work and schedule, often making themselves available for consultation. Psychologists work to be culturally sensitive when implementing new frameworks and analyzing behavior. Cultural beliefs, practices, traditions, and teachings are considered when determining why a child may be behaving in a particular manner.

Implementation

Participants were asked about the implementation of new conflict management programs, how they were involved in the initial implementation, benefits they observed, and any barriers that they faced. Three key themes emerged regarding the implementation of PBIS, Restorative Practices, or a combination of frameworks.

Various Levels of Responsibility. School psychologist responsibilities within the PBIS or Restorative Practices frameworks is highly dependent upon the resources of a school. The assessment caseload, support services, direct instruction, and time in consultation with other staff either allows or prevents psychologists from taking on responsibilities related to these programs. Some psychologists collect, analyze, and present behavioral data. Some psychologists create materials for lessons, create school songs or chants, or materials to be posted around the school. Other psychologists are utilized within these frameworks in more of a consultative manner, participating in teams and supporting staff as needed.

Buy-in. Like many other systems change efforts, it is difficult to gain and maintain buy-in while implementing a conflict management program. Many psychologists noted that gaining buy-in from teachers, staff, parents, and other

stakeholders was the most prominent barrier during the implementation process. It is challenging to gain buy-in when stakeholders are not adequately educated about a program. Not all school staff received training about the new program or how to implement it. Resulting in a lack of consistency as some staff implemented the program with fidelity and others did not. Several psychologists recommended biannual, quarterly, or more often if necessary, meetings to discuss the program and keep personnel grounded in the framework. When attempting to gain buy-in, it is important to note that school behavioral data may not be accurate. Not all behavior incidents are reported. Informing stakeholders that data may not accurately reflect what is occurring within a school building and behaviors may be more significant than reported can help to gain buy-in. In order to gain and maintain buy-in, stakeholders need to be aware that behavioral changes take time; consistent implementation is required for the desired outcomes to be observed.

Positive Atmosphere. The benefit perceived by most psychologists is a more positive school atmosphere. As a common language and problem-solving strategy is used, lines of communication among students and teachers are opened. Relationships between peers and students and staff can be strengthened as they are encouraged to talk through problems collaboratively. More focus is placed on understanding the student and their behavior instead of the situation and the consequence. As individuals work together to resolve a problem or work towards a common goal, positive relationships are established and maintained. Changes were also noted regarding parent-teacher relationships; these relationships became more positive as parents were notified about positive behavior instead of only negative behavior. The PBIS and Restorative Practices

frameworks also facilitate more opportunities for students and staff to be involved and feel included or valued within the group setting.

Effectiveness

Participants were asked about their perceptions of conflict management programs. Specifically, about the program's effectiveness in promoting a positive climate, supporting relationship building, and reducing behavior problems. Three themes emerged related to the effectiveness of conflict management programs.

Some Change in Climate. Most psychologists noted some change in climate. However, these changes were not found to be as drastic or significant as other areas. As previously mentioned, a common language and opportunities for students to work towards a greater goal strengthened the sense of community within the school. Student's sense of self-efficacy was developed as they were integral in the problem-solving process and developing problem solving strategies. Changes in school climate were dependent upon the level of buy-in from other school staff. Psychologists noted that when there was little buy-in, and these programs were not carried out with fidelity, there was subsequently little to no change in climate. In schools where buy-in was limited or still being developed, psychologists believed that PBIS and Restorative Practices were more effective in promoting positive climate compared to doing nothing or using no conflict management program.

Promotes Relationship Building. As one participant stated, "positive attention leads to positive interactions." In programs such as PBIS where positive behaviors are highlighted, reinforced, and encouraged and programs such as Restorative Practices where students and teachers work collaboratively to solve problems and mend

relationships, the positive effort that students are contributing is acknowledged. This positive attention, whether it be getting a reward for walking silently or effectively working through a problem with a peer, develops a student's confidence related to problem solving and ability to meet behavioral expectations while promoting positive relationships with others. Students and staff have the opportunity to have more genuine conversations as they work through problems or hold proactive circles. Teachers and staff become more open and willing to engage with students. Students also develop their perspective taking skills. Students are more likely to understand another's perspective and how their actions may have affected others when an intentional conference is held. Students are able to empathize with their peers and in turn show more respect to others after an incident occurs.

Not the Sole Contributor. When talking about reducing negative behaviors, many psychologists emphasized that PBIS and Restorative Practices are likely not the only contributor to reduction in rates. Overall, such programs are effective because they reach a large group of students and are implemented in a tiered framework. That being said, there are students who require more support, and while these programs are designed to provide that support, they also require more resources to be able to provide behavioral services and intervention. Psychologists noted that there were other changes which occurred in the school at the same time these programs were being implemented. Examples of additional changes include new administration, a check-in/check-out system, the implementation of a social-emotional learning team to track students, etc. Schools that had high rates of negative behavior and suspension prior to implementation of PBIS or Restorative Practices reported seeing minimal reduction; psychologists

reported that schools with significant behavior problems required more time with a conflict management program before effects on reducing negative behaviors could be observed.

Impact on the Practice of School Psychologists

Participants were asked about how utilizing conflict management programs changed their day-to-day practice and support services. Two themes emerged: changes in their practices were dependent upon their responsibilities and they felt more connected to the school community.

Responsibilities. As mentioned previously when discussing implementation, school psychologists take on different roles and responsibilities based on the needs of a particular school. School psychologists that were more involved in the initial implementation stage of systems change, also tended to take on more responsibilities as the program continued to be utilized. Some psychologists are responsible for collecting data, some facilitate team meetings, and some are used in a less frequent consultative manner. The more involved psychologists are in the conflict management program, the more their day-to-day practice changed.

Psychologists reported feeling more aware of and connected to the discipline that occurs within their school. Not only were they involved or consulted with for students that received special education services, but they were also familiar with the discipline of general education students. Similarly, the longer the program was implemented with fidelity, the more psychological support services changed. Many individual counseling cases turned into check-ins/check-outs instead of direct instruction or intervention.

Implementing a tiered approach to addressing behavioral needs, allowed student's behaviors to be targeted in a multitude of ways.

Community. As a result of a positive atmosphere, relationships, and change in school climate, psychologists reported that they also felt more connected to the school community. Psychologists were more visible to students and school personnel and more involved in school wide events. They were able to establish and maintain relationships with more students and staff members, not only those students and teachers who needed direct services or assistance. Psychologists also felt a stronger sense of community within the school psychology field. As several schools within a district implemented these new programs, the school psychologists were able to establish stronger connections as they supported each other through the transition.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to the study, all of which have to do with the innate differences within our schools and education system. First, schools are fundamentally different. Each school is a subsystem within a district, within a state, within the national education system, and therefore, each school system operates differently. The conflict management programs discussed within this study are not going to be effective or appear to be effective for all schools. The experiences and perceptions of school psychologists is going to differ.

Second, the results of this study may not generalize to other schools or districts. Gaining insights from more psychologists may be helpful in further understanding how these programs affect the practice. Participants were also from one region (Mid-Atlantic) of the United States. Schools in other regions may experience different behavior

challenges, have a different structure, more or less resources, implementation strategies, etc. which may lead to more positive perceptions of PBIS or Restorative Practices.

Third, the practice and responsibilities of school psychologists differ depending on the state and district. Some psychologists may be more integral in the implementation and continued utilization of these programs. As a psychologist is more involved or has more hands-on experience with a conflict management program, they are able to develop stronger perceptions and opinions of such program.

Implications for School Psychologists

Through interviews with psychologists, differences at all levels, personal, professional, school building, system level, etc., were highlighted. Conversations with psychologists showed that they take on many roles within the school building; not only are they involved in special education determination, but they are also responsible for providing support to students and staff through their roles within conflict management programs. Many of these psychologists were eager to discuss their experiences with PBIS and Restorative Practices because their colleagues may not utilize such programs within their schools. As a psychologist, knowing your school building and being aware of systems change will be beneficial in implementing a new program.

New programs, whether they focus on conflict management or other needs, will be rolled out to schools differently. It is important to do your own research and familiarize yourself with programs that work for other systems. Lean on other psychologists for support and be willing to have honest conversations. Ask about what went smoothly during implementation and what a psychologist or school would do differently if given the chance.

Take time to consider what a new program would mean for your own practice as well as the school at large. Consider what resources are available, your workload, time commitments, potential responsibilities, etc. Revisit the fact that systems change takes time and be patient. Remind others that changes in outcome will not be visible overnight. Patience, persistence, and implementing a program with fidelity will likely result in some outcome. Rely on data and make changes to the program as needed to have the opportunity to reach desired outcomes.

Systems change work is difficult to accomplish alone. Psychologists are often the member in the school building who brings others together to discuss issues and interventions. Create a conflict management team for support and collaboration.

It can be difficult to choose which program will work for a particular school. With a team, determine the school's goals and determine if they align with the goals of a program. While programs like PBIS and Restorative Practices are often implemented to minimize behavior problems, that is likely not the only goal. These programs help to support behavior change by setting expectations, building relationships, and improving school climate. During conversation, many psychologists encouraged the use of a tiered framework, such as PBIS, and adopting or supplementing that program with Restorative Practices strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of school systems use data to inform systems change. School personnel are able to assess the needs of students and intervene or implement programs based on those needs. Psychologists may not be involved in the systems changes decision, but they are likely involved in the implementation of a new program.

As with any systems change, psychologists were able to note benefits, such as creating a positive atmosphere, and liabilities, such as gaining buy-in, experienced during the transition to PBIS or Restorative Practices. Many of the school psychologists' perceptions of effectiveness were similar to research findings. Psychologists perceived PBIS and Restorative Practices as effective in regard to promoting relationship building and maintenance and supporting a positive school climate. Perceptions of the effectiveness in reducing negative behaviors was more mixed and possibly due to other changes that occurred within the same time frame. The degree to which conflict management programs affected the practice of school psychology was dependent upon the responsibilities that psychologists acquired. Psychologists also felt more connected to the school community as they were involved and active within the PBIS or Restorative Practices frameworks. There continue to be perceived benefits to implementing conflict management programs such as PBIS or Restorative Practices.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

What was your previous conflict management program?
What is your current conflict management program?

SYSTEM READINESS FOR CHANGE

1. What information did your system use to decide to change conflict management programs?
2. What are/were the hopes or expectations for improvement in the new program?
3. How is improvement being measured?
4. What are some of your professional characteristics that helped you during the change process?
    a. What helped you to contribute to the transition?
    b. What helped you personally?
    c. Any professional skills?

IMPLEMENTATION

1. How were you involved in the design, implementation, or evaluation of the new conflict management program?
2. What, if any, barriers did you face during the implementation stage of systems change?
3. What, if any, benefits did you experience during the implementation stage of systems change?

PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS

1. What are your perceptions of the effectiveness of PBIS or Restorative Practices in changing the school climate?
2. What are your perceptions of PBIS or Restorative Practices in your school for supporting building relationships?
3. What are your perceptions of PBIS or Restorative Practices in reducing discipline problems?
4. What are your perceptions of the impact PBIS or Restorative Practices has on members in the school building (students, teachers, administrators, etc.)?
5. Have you been able to see advantages of the new conflict management program over the previously used program?

IMPACT ON THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

1. How has the transition to PBIS or Restorative Practices impacted your day to day practice?
2. How has the transition to PBIS or Restorative Practices impacted the support services you are able to provide for behavioral concerns and/or academic concerns?
3. What advice or suggestions would you provide another school psychologist whose system was making this type of transition?

Appendix B

Summary of Responses from Interviews

Table 1.1 Summary of Responses Related to Systems Readiness for Change

	Question	PBIS	Restorative Practices
Systems Readiness for Change	What information did your system use to decide to change conflict management programs?	• Not sure • Already in place when started at the school • School data	• Data and observations • Levels of aggression in schools • Counselors advocated • District wide committee suggested implementation • Administration liked it • Stakeholders thought it addressed behavior issues in an equitable fashion
	What are/were the hopes or expectations for improvement in the new program?	• Create common behavior expectations • Teach and model appropriate behaviors • Reduce referral rates • Student knowledge of behavioral expectations and how to meet those expectations	• Utilizing alternatives to suspension • Creating a progressive discipline plan • Keep the students in the classroom • Suspension rates • Teaching students to problem solve and remove punitive measures • Stop/prevent marginalizing racial groups and over-identification
	How is improvement being measured?	• Progress monitoring • Discipline and referral data • Observational walk-throughs and interviews with children	• Attendance rates (overall, grade level, sped) • No formal methods, but looking at major and minor referral data • School specific data (suspensions, demographics, etc.)
	What are some of your professional characteristics that helped you during the change process? What helped you to contribute to the transition? What helped you personally? Any professional skills?	• Hands-on staff development • Team member • More consultation with teachers • Understanding that behavior is communication • Systematic way to approach behavior • Developing BIP aligned with PBIS framework • Model how PBIS can work through individual interactions with students	• Willingness to be vulnerable • Patience • Helping people identify emotions • Perspective taking and listening • Modeling appropriate behaviors • Hands-on staff development • Training and books to refer to • Facilitate and guide conversation • Advocate for the student • Ability to easily build relationships with students • Cultural sensitivity and openness to students teaching you • Flexibility and time in schedule • Offer additional explanations for behaviors

Table 1.2 Summary of Responses Related to Implementation

	Question	PBIS	Restorative Practices
Implementation	How were you involved in the design, implementation, or evaluation of the new conflict management program?	• Collect and review behavioral data • Define/restate expectations across settings • Check-ins with students • Support school-wide events • Part of team • Utilize data in decision making • Create action plan • Professional development • Be present and offer support • Promote use of common language • Create materials	• Not involved • Sent to training • Only involved at some schools • Part of team • Restorative conferences, proactive circles, re-entry circles • Facilitated administrator conferences • Consult with team • Push-in to classroom to support circles and model for students
	What, if any, barriers did you face during the implementation stage of systems change?	• Buy-in • Behavior data is not always accurate • Takes time to teach the expectations and consistently follow through • Perception that PBIS is only giving rewards • Competing against other priorities in the school • Appropriate training for all teachers • Availability to hold meetings	• Buy-in • Behavioral interventions not always carried out with fidelity • Amount of time it takes to implement • Unfamiliarity with framework • Lack of utilization • Time, contacting families, and getting them involved • Forcing program on students • Non-school based staff was not incorporated in implementation process
	What, if any, benefits did you experience during the implementation stage of systems change?	• Positive parent and teacher connections • Events create a positive atmosphere • Students able to reflect and see growth in their behavior • Not pointing out particular students, but using it universally • Students can tell you what the expectations are and give examples • Common language around the school	• More child-centered and different attitude within the schools • Few students who were impulsive have become less • Mending of relationships • Small behavior reduction • Parents have been receptive • Opens dialogue • Aids healing process • Sense of community • Social emotional learning brought into the classroom • Students like coming to school • Students taught how to calm down

Table 1.3 Summary of Responses Related to Perceptions of Effectiveness

	Question	PBIS	Restorative Practices
Perceptions of Effectiveness	What are your perceptions of the effectiveness in changing the school climate?	• More effective than doing nothing • Depends on staff climate • Teacher buy-in needed • All students can work towards a greater goal • Not a huge change • Common language creates sense of community • Students following expectations	• Encourages openness • Teaches skills within the classroom • Students approach problems and conflict differently • Overall, it has not changed • Greater sense of self-efficacy • Community • Administrators expecting permanent changes, but behavior is an ongoing need
	What are your perceptions of PBIS or Restorative Practices in your school for supporting building relationships?	• Positive attention promotes positive interactions • Common language • Reaches a large amount of students • Students show respect to each other	• Great for relationship building • Time to have conversations • Positive changes seen on individual level but not systems wide • Openness and willingness to engage with students • Students take perspective and understand how their choices may have caused harm
	What are your perceptions of PBIS or Restorative Practices in reducing discipline problems?	• Sets expectations and allows staff to build more supports for students • Have lowered but might not be the only reason • Uniformity using supports to impact behavior	• Coupled with other things, there has been a significant difference • Not significant • Slight decrease • Reparation not reduction
	What are your perceptions of the impact on members of the school building (students, teachers, administrators, etc.)?	• Consistency among grade levels and across programs promotes community • Staff generally feels more supported and appreciated • Everyone in school uses reinforcers in all settings • Not all members are aware of PBIS • Changes their expectations of behaviors instead of reacting • Rewarding positive behaviors • Not emphasized as much between staff members	• Promotes working as a team • Not everyone understands how to use the strategies and ask students questions • Don't see change among adults, but there are changes between student-teacher • Encourages awareness of all roles and highlights how each person impacts the school • Communicate in real time about problems • Not used consistently so students receive different levels of character building
	Have you been able to see advantages of the new conflict management program over the previously used program?	• Students work collaboratively to reach a goal • Students more willing to help each other • Greater sense of community	• Focus on relationships • How behaviors impact others

Table 1.4 Summary of Responses Related to the Impact on Role

	Question	PBIS	Restorative Practices
Impact on the Role of the School Psychologist	How has the transition impacted your day to day practice?	• More meetings • Actively analyzing data and supporting program • Duties after school • Conversations about behavior can be tied back to the expectations • BIP can be aligned with expectations	• Calm down area in office • Consultation with teachers who have a lot of behavior problems and offering support • Increased workload • More check-ins • More visible in the school and able to build relationships with staff • More connected with discipline
	How has the transition impacted the support services you are able to provide for behavioral concerns and/or academic concerns?	• Easier to provide behavioral support • Give out rewards during sessions • Actively use language and re-explain it as needed • Build in own reinforcers • Creates foundation for students to be taught in a small group and reinforced in tier 1 intervention	• Counseling became more check-ins • More referrals for behavior • Support with program in the classroom • More tools to use during counseling • Structured approach to problem solving • Facilitates and grounds communication • Team approach • Use of affective questions for emotional identification
	What advice or suggestions would you pro ide another school psychologist whose system was making this type of transition?	• When implementing, do it at a time that will be successful • Create a team • Be patient • It's a lot of work to get started • Show teachers how much academic progress is being made as a result of positive behaviors • Be confident in your training • Have honest conversations about what's going on in the building • Target specific classes that need extra support • Visit schools where these programs are working well • Consider other initiatives the school is implementing • Plan for regular meetings with teachers, administrators, mental health staff, etc.	• Plant seeds • Ask stakeholders where they would like to be in a few years • Consider your evaluation caseload and other responsibilities • Create multidisciplinary team to gain buy-in • Team will help reduce burnout • Involve support staff • Start with proactive circles • Try to get parents and community involved • Try using it in addition to tiered framework • Reconceptualize what is already being done within the school • Make training a priority and encourage questions

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